

### The re-ordering of political, cultural and social spaces through transnational labour migration

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## The Re-Ordering of Political, Cultural and Social Spaces Through Transnational Labour Migration

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## Introduction

The intention of this presentation is to show that through migration, in this case international labour migration within the global South, visions and processes of development are reworked and renegotiated. Through these processes spatial as well as cultural particularities and development visions emerge and get localised. These development visions or interests do not necessarily correspond with the metanarrative of development or modernity underlying the current debates about the possible and positive relationship between migration and development which are, to put it very general and simplified, conceptualised mainly as economic development, as the focus on remittances for example reveals. The aim of this paper is to analyse how development visions are changing through migration experiences, how these visions are socially and culturally embedded and how they are getting negotiated locally thus leading to the constitution of new political, social and cultural spaces. Gender and gender relations are fundamental in this context because they are necessary to explain why some visions of development “...are more equal than others” (Nederveen Pieterse 2001: 41) and to furthermore reveal that gender is a constitute element of migration<sup>1</sup> although this dimension has not yet entered mainstream debates on migration and development.

The current debates about the migration-development nexus or “new enthusiasm” (Faist 2007) concerning the role migrants and their communities can play in the development of their countries of origin are focussed around transnational or diaspora communities in industrial countries and their potential to initiate development processes in their countries of origin. It is argued, for example, that the maintenance of linkages and the existence of networks between countries lead to development activities which go beyond narrow social support of families or consumption needs (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Nyberg-Sorensen et al. 2002; Black and King 2004). Thereby it can be observed that a possible engagement is taken for granted as well as the transformative impact of the so-defined development activities as if there is a causal relationship between engagement and development processes and the manifestation of transnational identities formations, networks or institutionalized linkage. Examples given are the activities of home town associations in migrants’ countries or communities of origin<sup>2</sup> which transfer funds and expertise leading to an improvement in infrastructure,

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<sup>1</sup> See for an overview concerning the gendered structure of migration Willis and Yeoh 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000; Kofman 2004; Piper 2005

<sup>2</sup> Especially for Mexico quite a range of studies do exist showing the relevance of these hometown associations

access to services, or poverty reduction in these localities. Nevertheless in-depth empirical or comparative studies are missing as do discussions how these activities are negotiated between the different actors locally.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these shortcomings an important shift in these debates can be analysed namely by highlighting that through migration the role of nation states and the respective market forces in steering development is losing importance, while the influence of new spaces and new actors like migrants, their organizations, transnational social movements, and NGOs is growing. Nevertheless development as a complex and conflictive process is hardly ever conceptualized in the current debates. The development visions and ideas of the new actors, the question how development activities do relate to transnational identities or how the visions and activities are negotiated in the countries of origin does not play a decisive role yet. Furthermore other migrant groups, like labor migrants' male or female, as agents of development, are seldom mentioned in these debates even though this migration pattern has tremendously increased especially in the South, and is of economic relevance for a range of so-called developing countries. The specific features of such pattern of migration, as for example, the increased feminization, temporary return or leaving families behind, may have significant and yet different development implications. For these migrants migration is not only an "economic event", as often argued in the mainstream literature dealing with this migration pattern, but also a "cultural event" (Gidwani and Sivaranakrishnan 2003: 190) transforming identities and perceptions of development and localities. Temporary labor migration is leading to transformations, changes, and constructions of development on different scales which cannot be analyzed in a purely economic sense, but consider the social and cultural context they are embedded in. Thus on the basis of migration processes between Bangladesh and Malaysia the development visions and the activities of labor migrants will be analyzed. It will be shown that the migrants are not one actor with one development vision but that gender and the respective social and cultural context do structure the visions or development activities of those involved as well as the possibilities to localize and negotiate the visions. The mobilization of gendered or religious identities due to new social relations, the

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for development processes in their home communities (see for example Conway and Cohen 1998; Cohen et al. 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Only recently studies have been conducted analyzing the negotiation processes, the struggles, and conflicts accompanying the development activities of transnational communities at local levels. Gerharz's (2007) empirical study of the development activities of the Tamil diaspora in Jaffna for example reveals that the visions as well as the activities of the transnational migrants and the local population are not necessarily concurring<sup>3</sup> and that new inequalities and disparities emerge due to the development activities of the transnational communities.

changing sense of the self, the transnational practices and networks or the changing understanding of work are important processes which are explaining the rework and reconstruction of development. The empirical material allows further to dissect how development visions and ideas are getting localized and negotiated thus constituting political, social and cultural spaces in the so-called sending country.<sup>4</sup> Networking with others actors transnationally as well as locally play an important role. Thus the different often competing development visions and identities will be identified in the following with the aim to, on one hand, show the importance of identity formations as part of the at least temporary transnational experiences and the influences these formations do have on notions of development. On the other hand and on a more general level, this presentation tries to show that development, be it economic, social, or cultural, is always a dynamic process mediated and transformed by the actors involved. Interactions, negotiations, and social struggles between different actors and between different cultural and social forces are an intrinsic part of this dynamic (Long 1992; Lachenmann 1997). Thereby it is assumed that such a perspective can broaden the current theoretical debates on migration and development by bringing in temporary labor migrants as well as a South-South perspective. Additionally on a policy level such an inclusion may help to develop intervention strategies and a more democratic deployment of strategies and concepts which are embedded in the life worlds of those who are moving as well as those who are not moving.

## Male and Female Migration: The Emergence of New Development Discourses

International labor migration has become a semi-permanent form of economic engagement in Bangladesh. Migration is so common in Bangladesh, the imagination about life and success abroad so often reproduced, that all aspirations and hopes for a better future are often projected on a temporary life outside. Doubtless economic considerations and interests shape the migrations of the majority of migrants interviewed. But their decisions are furthermore embedded in wider notions of change, progress, and development for themselves, their families and communities already before the migration process.

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion concerning the re-ordering and renegotiation of ethnic identities in receiving countries like for example Malaysia see Dannecker 2005b.

Development before the migration experience was broadly defined as individual development, especially in the case of the female migrants interviewed, who often stated that they want to “develop” themselves. This was illustrated, for example, by the desire to see other countries, to experience new things, or to sit on a plane. Of course, as mentioned already, social and economic developments also played a role such as giving children access to better education, to improve the housing and living standard of the respective families, or to earn money for a dowry to get a ‘good’ husband. In case of the male migrants, self development played less of a role, which was mainly due to the fact that most of the male migrants were ‘forced’ to leave<sup>5</sup>. Their families were often the ones who organized the migration for them since in the case of the male migrants spatial mobility is closely related to economic and social mobility and thus development. In the case of female migrants the situation differs since the international migration of a female member of a family means a possible decline in status for the family or community due to concepts of shame and honor which require the social control of women, as will be elaborated in a later context. Already at this stage of the migration process the collective<sup>6</sup>, as in case of the male migrants, versus the individual agency, as in case of the female migrants, becomes obvious, as do the different development visions and expectations of the different actors involved. Thus the local context, experiences of returned migrants, and gender relations not only structure migration processes even before possible movements but moreover should be included in reflections and discussions about development visions and possible future activities.

The interviews also gave some insights about the amount of remittances sent back, the channels used for the transfer of money, as well as the use of the remittances. Certainly remittances are an important economic resource for the families back home and are used to secure the daily survival and for consumption needs of the families. Furthermore like in case of some male migrants remittances were also used for building mosques in their respective villages, revealing that remittances are not only a economic resource but having social and cultural meanings. Thus for the families and the local communities the economic and social relevance of the remittances is significant, even though it did not lead to sustainable economic development within the communities and families studied. Yet, more important for the discussion concerning the relationship between migration and development seems to be the

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<sup>5</sup> See Dannecker 2003

<sup>6</sup> I refer here to Long’s definition of a collective actor „...a coalition of actors, who at a given moment, share some common definition of the situation, or goals, or interests, or values, and who agree, tacitly or explicitly, to pursue certain courses of social action“ (2000: 195).

fact that the meanings of development change through the migration experiences and the new social relations and practices. Especially for the male, but for the female migrants, development becomes, through their migration experiences and interactions, a set of beliefs and imaginations of how life should be. The building of mosques is only one of many examples to support this argument, as will be shown later. This dimension, namely that development becomes a set of beliefs and imaginations of how life should be is of special interest, since it shows that the meaning of development through migration is changing from concrete economic and social interests to broader social transformations and developments. This change in meaning which is gendered is important because it might differ from the understanding of development promoted by families remaining behind, by state governments, as well as national and international organizations and thus can be the cause for conflicts, discontents and struggles. Furthermore this perspective sheds light on changes and transformations on a societal level which occur as a result of increased mobility worldwide.

## The Transformation of Gender Relations: The Female Perspectives

“I liked my stay in Malaysia very much. I changed a lot while being abroad. I gained a lot of weight, I was really healthy, I liked being together with the other female workers and I could move because the place was safe. I liked most that I had the possibility to work. Women there can earn their own money and people do not gossip about them. On the contrary their husbands support them. In Bangladesh men do not work in the house, they just leave their *lungis*<sup>7</sup> wherever they are. Men are idle in our country. Here we are not supposed to work outside the house and if we do people will say bad things. Our husbands will also never support a working woman even if they themselves have no job like in my case. All the money I have sent back he has spent for nonsense mainly for his second marriage. I would like to earn my own money but here there are no possibilities. They say a good Muslim woman does not work outside the house, but aren't the Malays are also good? Thus the only possibility for me is to migrate again or to give credit to other women planning to leave. I know much more than before which might make it easier at the beginning. Here things are not changing for us, on the contrary”. (Nazma, 30 years old worked for nearly 6 years in an electronic factory in Malaysia)

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<sup>7</sup> A *lungi* is a skirt like garment for men.



The migration experience of the majority of the women interviewed, as Nazma's narrative illustrates, led to new discourses concerning the existing gender relations in Bangladesh and to a mobilization and reconstruction of her gender identity. The comparison between the different life-worlds and the different contexts, due to the transnational experience, resulted in criticisms of the structural elements of the Bangladeshi society; for example, of typical male behavior or the lack of employment opportunities for women in Bangladesh. The disagreements over meanings, which are inherent to migration (Goldring 1999: 168), can be analyzed in the case of female migrants with respect to the existing gender relations and are leading to new development visions and perspectives focusing on equality between men and women. This issue, which has long been on the agenda of international as well as national organizations and institutions, becomes an important dimension in the discourse concerning development possibilities for themselves and their families (Rozario 2003: 67). Thus the boundaries between the fulfillment of personal ambitions and wider social responsibilities and transformations are becoming stretched. The right to work was articulated as the main means for self-transformation. Health, symbolized by the temporary gaining of weight, as well as greater mobility as experienced abroad, were evaluated in connection with the possibility to work. Only few of the women interviewed complained about the work or the working conditions abroad, in contrast to the male migrants.

Nevertheless the articulation as well as the negotiation of these visions on different scales is difficult, especially for the women. Doubtless temporarily returned migrant women have started to contest local practices directly, for example through giving loans to other women who are planning to leave. Many of the women evaluated money lending as the only and the most profitable investment they can perform<sup>8</sup> or to put it differently as the only productive development activity. Visiting former colleagues, or wearing so-called 'Western' clothes at home at least, as well as criticizing their husbands and families by referring to the Malaysian context and their experiences there can also be seen as challenging the existing gender relations. Many women even started to argue on religious grounds; well aware that in Bangladesh Malaysia is perceived as a role model for religious as well as possible economic devel-

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<sup>8</sup> This does not mean that they did not transfer money while being abroad, at least in the beginning, to legitimise their movements. Nevertheless all women interviewed saved some of the money they earned 'secretly'. But financial resources are difficult to invest. Whereas men have possibilities to invest in business or land, women, especially in rural areas, do not have these options. Thus many of the returned migrants interviewed argued that financing migration processes does not only help women who are planning to migrate but furthermore allows them to make some profit. This happens in most of the cases without the knowledge of the families. Thus in some areas a new female-based credit system developed parallel to already existing ones which are not necessarily accessible for women. The interest rate is generally similar to the interest rate set by local money lenders (see Dannecker 2005a).

opments. Women expressed in particular the fact that in Malaysia the Islamization process went hand in hand with female employment, whereas in Bangladesh female employment outside the house is perceived as a violation of the Islamic defined gender order. Migrant women thus develop their own representation of gender, Islam and development and also introduce new gender practices locally. Non-migrant women are adopting some of the new practices and are starting to imagine a life abroad as well. For them prospects of mobility increasingly constitute what development stands for. Nevertheless these development visions, mainly the transformation of gender relations, are difficult to articulate and to negotiate since their visions are not reconcilable with the visions of the other actors in different fields and on different scales. As mentioned already, negotiating development and development visions is a process that requires spaces for networking, exchange, and interactions. But the spaces are restricted and difficult to constitute for Bangladeshi migrant or returned migrant women.

This analysis is supported by the observations that female migration lead to discourses and a distinction of the 'good' women who have not migrated and female migrants as the 'bad' others in different spaces. Within this context interaction, exchanges, and networking and thus solidarity between women is difficult to develop. Although returned female migrants identified very much with their female co-migrants, the development of networks or other social forms necessary for the renegotiation of gender relations are not very successful in an environment and in social spaces where female migration is constructed as un-Islamic and incompatible with the local culture. Gilroy (1997) states that "the awareness of multi-locality stimulates the desire to connect oneself with others, both 'here' and 'there' who share the same routes and roots". This desire became obvious during field research but could not be effected in any sustainable social form. The women interviewed were, for example, always very eager to show pictures of themselves in Malaysia as well as pictures of other workers they did not even know. The photographs can be interpreted as a mean to visualize their self-transformation and as an expression of the self-confidence which developed because of the migration experience but which cannot be expressed in public spheres. Furthermore this example shows how the returned migrants try to connect themselves spatially as well as temporally to other distant often even unknown actors. They try to stretch their networks which are still much more informal than the male networks and more difficult to sustain due to the described context.

Thus the negative perception of female migration as a violation of the existing gender order and women's decent behavior defined in an Islamic way makes it difficult for women to leave and furthermore makes the negotiation or localization of their development visions nearly

impossible. Networks, as stated already, are difficult to develop and other actors, for example NGOs or government agencies, are reluctant to organize or support migrant women. This can be said for the different and connected phases of the migration process as well as for possible alliances concerning the negotiation of their development visions after or between migration phases. National, international and transnational developmental NGOs in Bangladesh constitute important spaces for the negotiation of alternative visions of development, gender equality, and women's rights (White 1999). But few NGOs in Bangladesh working in the area of gender and development have enlarged their fields of activities to include migration in general or female migration in particular. Indeed only once in 1997 when the Bangladeshi government banned autonomous migration of Bangladeshi women without male guardians—legitimized as a precautionary measure to protect women and their families' honor—did NGOs and other civil society groups engage and oppose the ban (Siddiqui 2001). They viewed it as unconstitutional and discriminatory against women. Other activities for female migrants have not been developed, nor have their development visions entered the agenda of national, international or transnational civil society actors. This also can be said for the number of NGOs specializing in foreign labor advocacy which originated in the 1990s, often with international support. These organizations try to push the government to offer training for migrants before leaving, lobbying bilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries, support organization building and activities of networks and want to help returned migrants to reintegrate.<sup>9</sup> Most of these NGOs network with NGOs in receiving countries. A considerable amount of political activity by these organizations is undertaken transnationally. Nevertheless the focus of these organizations is predominantly on male migrants as in the case of the governmental agencies in charge of the organization of migration processes.<sup>10</sup> Special interests and problems of female migrants are rarely on the agenda except when the issue of trafficking of women is mentioned. Female migrants lack the necessary support for organization building.<sup>11</sup> The fact that the female migrants interviewed have no information about the organizations for male migrants described indicates that they are not included in the existing migrant networks. There are, however, male migrant organizations and networks stretching the borders of the two nation states. These migrant networks and organizations became important and constitutive actors in the new transnational space. The

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<sup>9</sup> Examples are SHISUK, an NGO working explicitly in the field of migration or CWAB, the Christian Workers Association. See Bruyn and Kuddus 2005 for a more detailed analysis of their activities.

<sup>10</sup> The main governmental organisations are the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) and the Bangladesh Overseas Employment services Limited (BOESL) (INSTRAW 2000).

<sup>11</sup> One exception is BOSMA the Bangladeshi Ovhibashi Mohila Sramik Association.

networks are important for information exchanges concerning recruitment agencies, work possibilities, legal regulations, and money transfer or to link possible migrants to already existing networks in receiving countries. They furthermore provide information concerning social and economic development possibilities after return<sup>12</sup> and also have close relations with government organizations. The majority of the members of these organizations are men who have developed a clear migrant identity. Female migrants were only mentioned as victims of sexual harassment abroad or as victims of foreign employers and recruitment agencies. Although there is evidence that exploitation and harassment of female migrants occurs, nevertheless in case of male migrants' networks it can be argued that this issue is used to lobby for more restrictive laws concerning women's mobility. Migration, especially labor migration, is still defined as a male endeavor despite the fact that more and more women are moving. Therefore NGOs and others actors are reluctant to respond to transformations such as the increased migration of women, nor are they likely to question existing gender relations and thus structural elements of Bangladeshi society.

In case of the female migrants the migration experience had lead to a mobilization and reconstruction of their gendered identity. The development visions articulated were closely related to this new identity formation, namely the transformation of gender relations. But as the analysis has shown migrant women do have no public voice even though their remittances are important for the survival of their families as well as for the national economy. Nevertheless due to the social and cultural context, remittances, expertise or skill are in case of the female migrants no means for societal transformations or do open new spaces for negotiations. The construction of migrant women as moving in spaces not made for them leads not only to the negative image of female migrants as described, but furthermore makes networking or alliances with other actors nearly impossible. Their development visions, the transformation of the existing gender relations is therefore difficult to negotiate in local, regional, or transnational social spaces. Thus the majority of women interviewed evaluated remigration as the only possibility for further development. Mobility and movement for female labor migrants in particular are identical to development, at least as long as they do not see any chance to articulate and localize their visions of development.

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<sup>12</sup> WARBE for example is one of these associations.

## Development as Islamization: The Male Migrants

“The time in Malaysia was not easy. We had to work nearly every day and the income was much lower than promised. I also had some bad experiences with Indians but these things I never tell when people asked me about my stay. But I liked Malaysia; it is a good Muslim country therefore they are so successful. There are no fights, no *hartals*<sup>13</sup> and the government has everything under control. They care about their people. And the Malays are good as well. I think we should do it the same way. The situation would improve and the country would develop. I am happy that I am back but nothing has changed. I am helping my father with the garment shop he started on the market with the money I have sent back but that is not a good business. But there is nothing else I can do. I sit together with other migrants and I try to help others who are planning to leave. Maybe I will also get into politics but this I have not decided yet”. (Nabi, 25 years old worked for 5 years in a garment factory Malaysia).

In case of the male migrants it can also be analyzed that the notion of development changed because of their migration experiences, as the quotation from Nabi’s narrative reveals. But also the transnational networks migrants and other actors have constituted play a decisive role. Quite a number of male migrants interviewed used the term development not in relation to economic or social development processes within the family or community, but as a means to describe necessary societal and national transformations to enable development processes in different areas. Thereby Islam or better Islamization became the frame of reference for the realization of their development visions which is related to the mobilization of their religious identities through the migration process. This is due to the fact that most of the Bangladeshi male migrants were and are living and working in Muslim countries which are better off than their country of origin revealing how important the cultural and social context is. Thereby especially Malaysia serves, as Nabi’s narrative shows, as a role model. In Malaysia economic development went hand in hand with deep social transformations, Islamic Revivalism, and the politicization of Islam (Othman 2003; Nagata 1994; Camroux 1996). The state-led project of Islamization resulted mainly in an increasing institutionalization of Islam, with more rigid interpretations and the homogenization of local Islamic practices. Furthermore transnational Islamic networks and organizations play a role in this process since they are actively trying to mobilize religious identities often through service delivery and support.

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<sup>13</sup> *Hartals* are general strikes and a political strategy paralysing public life.

But neither the Islamic practices nor the more rigid interpretations were highlighted in the interviews, but rather the outcomes of these transformations. The economic and social developments, which is defined as part of the Islamization process, as well as the political stability and security were mentioned by many of the migrants as the most important results of the religious turn which took place for example in Malaysia. It becomes evident that for many local as well as transnational actors Malaysia represents an alternative development vision to the so-called Western development visions and concepts, one which is negotiated in the transnational space and reproduced and transferred by the male migrants and their organizations.

The reasons why this development vision is so attractive are manifold. Development activities undertaken by international and national organizations in Bangladesh over the last decades have not led to sustainable development processes. On the contrary, Bangladesh is highly dependent on foreign aid. For years 'Women and Development' is identified as one of the main development aims by national and international development organizations. Thus particularly in rural areas women are increasingly incorporated into development programs and projects thereby challenging gender relations but also male identities, constructions of masculinity and local culture and identity (Kabeer 1991). Additionally the growing regional and global demand for female workers, in export-oriented industries as well as in the service sector, is reducing men's options on labor markets across borders, and is interpreted furthermore as a threat to men's mobility and their own constructed male identity. Gardner and Osella (2003: xv) argue that "migration is often associated with not only intense competition between social groups but also that it often involves an undermining of the traditional bases of status and hierarchy". In the context discussed in this presentation the competition between men and women has definitely increased locally, transnationally as well as globally and is perceived as a challenge to the gender hierarchy and male status in society.

Furthermore, the realization that neither the remittances send back nor the new expertise or knowledge gained by male migrants through their experiences abroad makes a significant difference after return was translated into criticism towards the dominant economic and political structures in Bangladesh. This counts for their employment possibilities, their access to land, or their social embeddedness. Corruption on all levels was often mentioned as the main reason for their lack of possibilities. Thus only the transformation of the overall structural framework in Bangladesh is perceived as a route to successful development for themselves, their communities, and the nation. Islamization as a process and Islamic organizations and parties were presented as an alternative to the structures dominating the political, social, and economic spaces and the organizations and parties constituting them.

The mobilization of the religious identities can furthermore be connected to the fact that Malaysia is represented in Bangladesh as well as by the Bangladeshi migrants as a Muslim brother-country. In 1994 a memorandum by the two countries was signed to organize migration processes. The agreement was presented by the Bangladeshi government and Bangladeshi newspapers as part of the 'Muslim brotherhood' between the two countries (Rudnick 1996). In fact agencies in Bangladesh still use this slogan on the clothes the workers are ordered to wear when leaving Bangladesh. On a number of occasions I have encountered groups of Bangladeshi migrants at the airport in Dhaka dressed in T-shirts with the address of the agency printed on the back and 'Malaysia and Bangladesh Muslim Brotherhood' on the front. This not only gives them the feeling that they are, at least up to a certain point, incorporated into the host society, namely on religious grounds, but furthermore leads to the mobilization and the politicization of their religious identities and to the identification with transnational Islam<sup>14</sup>. The fact that they were not treated by Malays in Malaysia as Muslim brothers either inside or outside the factories, that personal relations were more the exception than the rule, and that even in the mosques they did not really feel welcome, does not lead to reconstructions of the 'Brother Country' myth (Dannecker 2005b). It remains a construct which is, despite the migrants' experiences, filled with hopes and fantasies and is deeply interwoven with the development and intensification of a new transnational Islamic identity.

These diverse dimensions mentioned add to the analyzed changes in notions and visions of development by the male migrants. Islamization as a process is not only promoted by male migrants, their networks and organizations, as the interviews reveal, to initiate economic, political, and social development processes, but furthermore is used to secure their opportunities on the regional and global labor markets which have changed because of global transformations. Demands, for example, to install a so-called Islamic gender order to reduce the women's ability to cross borders should be seen as a strategy to protect their own mobility, the status accompanying mobility, and to secure their economic and social options. Thus, as in the case of the female migrants, development is still, at least for a transition period, closely connected to mobility.

Regarding the development visions the male migrants are, in contrast to the female migrants, quite successful in the collective articulation and the localization of their visions in different spaces due to their networks and their interactions and alliances with other actors in Bangla-

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of transnational Islam see for example Grillo 2004

desh as well as in Malaysia.. Particularly the growth of Islamic parties and organizations in Bangladesh creates increasing possibilities to localize men's development visions and to constitute new spaces for negotiations.

Since the 1990s Islamic parties and organizations have gained tremendous influence in Bangladesh, not only in politics but also in their attempts to influence public discourses and debates. Whereas national identity in Bangladesh since independence has been traditionally based on the Bengali identity, since the 1990s Islam has played an increasing role in the country (Kabeer 1991). Islamic organizations and parties, which are part of global Islamic networks and thus form part of the growing global phenomenon of Islamism (Karlekar 2005), are trying to establish an Islamic national identity by questioning and challenging the so-called Western development vision, modernity, and globalization processes. Their strategy, the politicization of religious identities, seems to be successful especially in the case of the male migrants. Although this is not to say that religion did not constitute a social reality before migration, nevertheless due to the experiences mentioned above religion became increasingly a political reality. Gender and gender relations play an important role in this transformation process. Gender is in Bangladesh as elsewhere instrumental in constructing a specific vision of local culture and Islamic identity.

Thus the images about female migrants, as having a loose lifestyle for example, constructed by male migrants and their networks and transferred 'home' are used by the Islamic parties and organizations for the 'othering' of the so-called West and the rejection of Western development visions. The issues of gender relations, sexual and social conduct, women's space, place, work, dress, and rights are used, especially by the Islamic organizations and parties, to mark differences from 'others' and for the construction of a collective and national identity.

The growing influence of Islamic parties and organizations in Bangladesh is revealed on the one hand formally since the main Islamic party was a coalition partner in the last government<sup>15</sup>, and on the other informally indicated for example by the growing harassment of journalists or the prosecution of Bangladeshi Hindus (Hossain 2006). That the networking between the Islamic organizations and migrant organizations is successful is revealed by the fact that already in 1981 but also in 1997 bans were announced by the respective governments to strictly control the international mobility of women. In both cases many observers

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<sup>15</sup> At the moment a caretaker government is trying to organize elections within 2007. Nevertheless conflicts between the parties and their representatives are leading to demonstrations and fights and a peaceful solution of the actual crisis is not in sight.



assume that organizations of male migrants as well as Islamic organizations were the main proponents (Siddiqui 2001; Dannecker 2005a). For women it is becoming increasingly difficult in this context to move, to migrate, or to seek employment outside the house.

This of course does not imply that the different actors—the male migrants and their organizations or the Islamic organizations and parties—have the same agendas or are at every given moment one collective actor. Nevertheless they have developed strong and influential networks on the basis of religious identities spanning borders which have not yet lead to economic developments as in Malaysia but to restrictions concerning the spaces for women in Bangladesh in general and the collective agency of female migrants in particular.

## Conclusion

The empirical material presented thus was chosen to show that development visions as well as interests are changing due to transnational experiences and are structured through gender, an dimension ignored so far also in the current discussions concerning the development activities of diaspora communities. Migration leads to renegotiations of identities which do influence visions of development. This is not to say that remittances for example are not important for families, communities, developing countries or in some cases even for poverty alleviation. Nevertheless development should be conceptualized as a process which also leads to discontents and struggles between the different actors involved. Thereby the development visions which do develop constitute what development stands for. The economic, social and cultural contexts these visions are embedded in are important to understand the transformations and changes which can be observed in the countries of origin and which might be different than the development visions articulated by other national or international actors. In case of the male migrants, their organizations and networks a collective agency emerged through the mobilization of religious identities being able to localize Islamization as a development vision. In the case of the female migrants the gendered identity got renegotiated influencing their development visions but they were not able yet to develop networks, alliances or organizations to articulate or to localize their visions.

Development primarily defined as economic development, as in the current debates about migration and development, is hardly able to capture the complex and diverse processes and negotiations of development processes migration can initiate. Even though the perspective chosen in this paper makes it more difficult to discuss and analyze the relationships between migration and development or to give policy advice, I argue that we cannot stick to structural

or technocratic development concepts and approaches which have been increasingly questioned and challenged as modernistic or Northern biased—neither taking agency, gender, nor social and cultural dimensions into account. The visions of development as well as the agencies of those involved are changing in a globalizing world as have the features of migration processes. Without understanding the different visions of the actors involved in these processes, without taking the new identity formations which develop into account and without analyzing the respective social and cultural context these visions are embedded and localized in, intervention strategies regarding migration or development policies will fail. There is not only a need for in-depth studies on transnational human mobility, communication, social ties, flows of money, social relations, information and images, as argued by Vertovec (1999: 456), but also on the changing notion of development and its negotiations. The production and negotiation of knowledge about development and visions of development and the role migration and networking play within these processes should be increasingly the focus. Only then policies and strategies can be developed by national as well as international organizations and institutions which are embedded in the different understanding of development and may furthermore serve as a mirror of the changing economic and social capacities, priorities and choices (Nederveen Pieterse 2001: 7) of a globalizing world.

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